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Nicaragua Rebels Seek United Force

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SAN JOSE, Costa Rica, March 7 — Senior leaders of anti-Sandinista rebel groups based in Costa Rica say they want to form a united Nicaraguan opposition. But they say that so far neither Congress nor the Reagan Administration has supported their efforts.

The rebel officials, interviewed here this week, say that although they support President Reagan's efforts to give military aid to the Nicaraguan Democratic Force guerrillas based in Honduras, they believe military means alone stand no chance of toppling the Nicaraguan Government.

Instead, they contend that only a united opposition that includes all sectors of Nicaraguan political opinion, as well as the internal opponents of the Sandinistas, can mount the international political offensive that rebels here say will be needed to isolate the Sandinistas diplomatically and force them to negotiate.

"If we can form a united internal and external opposition, and if the armed groups get American aid, then the Sandinistas will find it much harder going by the end of 1986," said a top official of the Costa Rican-based rebel Southern Opposition Bloc. The organization is a coalition of Nicaraguan exile groups, including the Democratic Revolutionary Alliance led by a former Sandinista commander, Edén Pastora Gómez, and several small professional and labor union groups.

Bloc Includes Anti-Sandinistas

In contrast to the Nicaraguan Democratic Force guerrillas in Honduras, who are led by several former supporters of Anastasio Somoza Debayle, the deposed Nicaraguan dictator, the Southern Opposition Bloc includes several members of the first Sandinista Government, who say they left Nicaragua when the Sandinistas began curtailing civil liberties and turning to Moscow.

The rebel groups here are militarily

weak but have persistently survived as a political presence that is widely seen to represent the more centrist and social democratic wing of the Nicaraguan opposition.

Besides Mr. Pastora, their leaders include Alfredo César, former head of the Nicaraguan Central Bank under the Sandinistas; José Dávila, the former vice president of Nicaragua's Social Christian Party, and Donald Castillo, a former Nicaraguan union leader.

A booklet published by the Southern Opposition Bloc to explain its objectives says the rebels are fighting "for the establishment in Nicaragua of an authentically democratic political system where the danger of substituting the present communist dictatorship with another dictatorship similar to Somoza's is firmly discarded."

But so far, rebel officials here say, they have found little backing from the Reagan Administration, which has concentrated instead on supporting the guerrilla army in Honduras and forming a new rebel front called the United Nicaraguan Opposition.

Rebel officials here say they have been forced to survive on meager funds from Venezuela and Social Democratic Parties in Europe.

"Sandinistas have the firm backing of Cuba and the Soviet Union," Mr. Dávila said in an interview. "But we, the democrats of Nicaragua, don't feel the U.S. is behind us. We are all asking, What does Washington want?"

In recent months, Mr. Davila and Mr. César say, they held talks with the American-backed United Nicaraguan Opposition trying to define the terms of a possible alliance. But they say the talks broke down when it became apparent that the American-supported rebels were unwilling to share power and money with the rebels in Costa Rica.

In fact, the Reagan Administration gave Mr. Pastora substantial help in the past, using the Central Intelligence Agency to funnel several million dollars to support his rebel army between 1982 and 1984.

But Mr. Pastora proved to be an inept military commander and, perhaps more importantly, he rejected repeated C.I.A. efforts to persuade him to join with the rebels in Honduras. He said it made no sense for him to unite with former members of the defeated Nicaraguan National Guard, who are widely hated by the Nicaraguan people.

Mr. Pastora still nominally commands perhaps 1,000 guerrillas on the Costa Rican-Nicaraguan border, according to reliable rebel sources. But his men were badly bloodied by a Sandinista offensive last year and are now surviving on a shoestring, the sources say.